

LiveHelp: Volunteers Help People Find Legal Information Online

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Project Overview

In 2004 Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA), Iowa Legal Aid (ILA), and Pro Bono Net (PBN) received a Technology Initiative Grant to support the LiveHelp Pilot Project. The intent of the project is to allow MontanaLawHelp.org and IowaLegalAid.org Web site visitors to ask remotely-located volunteers for help finding online legal information and resources. Through an online chat, the volunteers are able to immediately direct the Web site visitors to appropriate legal information, and in the case of IowaLegalAid.org, help seniors complete an intake online.

Current Status

LiveHelp has been soft-launched on both MontanaLawHelp.org and IowaLegalAid.org/hotline. Implemented with LivePerson's Timpani software (<http://www.liveperson.com>), the feature currently allows Web site visitors to click a button, connect with a legal aid staff member, and ask for information about their legal problem. The staff member then provides the visitor with a link to the appropriate information or escorts the visitor to relevant resources on the site. (If a staff member is unavailable, the visitor can choose to leave a message and receive the information in an e-mail.)

MLSA operates the project with two staff members and two VISTA volunteers. Each person monitors MontanaLawHelp.org's help requests for approximately four hours per week. ILA operates the project with two staff members. Each person monitors IowaLegalAid.org's help requests for approximately thirty hours per week.

The project is considered soft-launched since the programs are still building the infrastructure necessary to handle volunteer recruitment, support, and management as well as developing marketing materials. A full launch of the LiveHelp feature is expected in May 2006.

Lessons Learned

Several important lessons have been learned during the soft-launch.

- Marketing must accompany the launch of the feature. Although MontanaLawHelp.org received over 13,000 hits between July 2005 and December 2005, only 167 chats occurred; a conversion rate of about 1%. Marketing the availability of LiveHelp will likely increase the conversion rate by making potential legal aid clients and their advocates more aware of LiveHelp.
- Staff members and volunteers must be familiar with Web site content. "Canned text," or previously prepared answers, will most likely eliminate some of the challenges posed by volunteers needing to be familiar with all of the Web site's content.
- More experienced visitors may be using LiveHelp once they have identified content that does not exist on the Web site, leading Web Site Coordinators to be able to better identify missing content. At the same time less experienced visitors may not be asking for help.

Want to know more?

If you'd like to learn more about this project or see a demonstration, contact one of the following people:

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